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ABSTRACT

Ten themes were explored at the Fifth World Conference on Adult Education: (1) adult learning and democracy; (2) improving the conditions and quality of adult learning; (3) ensuring the universal right to literacy and basic education; (4) adult learning, gender equality and equity, and the empowerment of women; (5) adult learning and the changing world of work; (6) adult learning in relation to environment, health, and population; (7) adult learning, culture, media, and new information technologies; (8) adult learning for all; (9) the economics of adult learning; and (10) enhancing international cooperation and solidarity. Some 1,500 government and nongovernmental organization representatives, adult education researchers, and practitioners took part in the conference. Issues of concern identified by the participants in the conference and the minorities working group included the following: civic education of majority, heterogeneous, and minority communities; curriculum reform; economic survival and control of natural resources; empowerment; engagement of community, monitoring, and evaluation; entitlement to basic education; minority victims; involvement of women; minorities' land rights; minority languages; minority materials; national schools; nomads and literacy; own history and cultural heritage; regional issues; and training minority communities. The conference also produced a Declaration on Adult Learning and an Agenda for the Future. (KC)

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Adult Education for All

ED 427 151

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Minority and Indigenous Communities at CONFINTEA V
held 14–18 July 1997, Hamburg, Germany

SEMINAR REPORT

Introduction

The term 'life-long learning' is often used to describe the current approach to education, an approach that involves people learning in many different environments – over large distances, in the workplace, or in non-formal settings – and throughout much of their lives. From learning basic numeracy or literacy skills to training on the latest software packages, people are using educational opportunities to take more effective control of their lives.

Yet education is about more than the transfer of skills. Education develops creativity, which is a key to survival and sustainable development. It also disseminates a culture's values, including those that determine its power relationships, and plays a role in the creation and maintenance of national identity. Given sufficient political will, education can be a powerful tool to help create a culture of rights, openness and peace, and ultimately prevent conflict and promote intercommunal cooperation. On the other hand, it can be exclusionist and divisive, exacerbating existing tensions within a society, or even creating new ones.

It is vital, therefore, that all members of society have access to appropriate and relevant educational opportunities. Minority and indigenous communities are often the most marginalized in the field of education, as in many areas. They can be excluded by overtly discriminatory practice, or through more subtle means such as policies on language of instruction. The work of Minority Rights Group International (MRG) indicates that this type of exclusion can cause minorities and indigenous peoples to feel threatened and frustrated. Furthermore, it is as important to educate majority communities to respect the rights and cultural identities of minorities who live within their state borders as it is to educate minorities themselves.

CONFINTEA V

In recognition of these and other issues the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE) held the Fifth World Conference on Adult Education, CONFINTEA V, in Hamburg, Germany from 14 to 18 July 1997. UNESCO identified the following 10 themes as crucial to the definition of adult learning priorities for the twenty-first century:

1. Adult learning and democracy: the challenges of the 21st century.
2. Improving the conditions and quality of adult learning.
3. Ensuring the universal right to literacy and basic education.
4. Adult learning, gender equality and equity, and the empowerment of women.
5. Adult learning and the changing world of work.
6. Adult learning in relation to environment, health and population.
7. Adult learning, culture, media and new information technologies.
8. Adult learning for all: the rights and aspirations of different groups.
9. The economics of adult learning.
10. Enhancing international cooperation and solidarity.

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Minority Rights Group International

It was established that adult education for minorities and indigenous peoples would be treated as sub-themes of the first theme on Adult Learning and Democracy.

Before the international conference opened, preparatory meetings with member states and international experts were held. There were five regional preparatory conferences in 1996 and early 1997 to prepare the regional perspectives on adult education and life-long learning for all: these were held in Brazil for the Latin American region, in Egypt for the Arab States, in Senegal for the African region, in Spain for the European region, and in Thailand for Asia and the Pacific region. In addition, there were thematic preparatory meetings on most of the 10 themes and the sub-themes; the minorities and the indigenous peoples sub-themes became key issues for debate at the conference. Finally, key groups of international experts were invited to different sessions of the preparatory consultative committee.

The UIE, aware of MRG's expertise in this field, established contact with MRG's Director and invited him to participate in the consultative committee. This cooperation led to a joint proposal to ensure the representation of minority and indigenous peoples at the Conference.

The MRG/UIE project had the following objectives:

- To **ensure participation** of minority and indigenous peoples' organizations in the conference and to provide a platform for their views;
- to **raise awareness** among conference participants of the adult education needs of minority and indigenous communities and of the need for majority communities to be educated about these communities and their rights;
- to **promote debate** on the issues raised;
- to **identify practical steps** to be undertaken; and
- to **encourage long-term dialogue** between adult educators working with minority and indigenous communities.

MRG and UIE used their international contacts to identify and invite 27 minority and indigenous representatives and activists. All are either involved in adult education work or have relevant expertise and might not otherwise have been able to attend the conference. MRG and UIE also organized two of the 31 public thematic working groups at the conference – one on minorities and one on indigenous issues – to raise these communities' concerns with a wide audience.

This Report is a brief overview of that conference and its participants' work, including plans for the future. It aims to provide readers with a picture of how an international conference works and illustrate the type of work in which MRG is involved.

Pre-conference activities

Once the minority participants had been identified, they were invited to hold meetings with their communities before the conference opened to gain a thorough understanding of their adult education needs. Activities were held in India, Nepal, Senegal, Tajikistan and Uganda. The following are examples of the work undertaken.

In Uganda, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), adult educators and members of the Human Rights Commission took part in a one-day workshop organized by the Human Rights and Peace Centre, Faculty of Law, Makere University (HURIPEC), to discuss matters of concern. The group noted that identifying minority groups in Uganda can be difficult, in part due to the arbitrary boundaries drawn up during colonial rule. Minority issues in Uganda, as in much of Sub-Saharan Africa, are thus linked to issues of self-determination and are politically highly sensitive. Furthermore, marginalization is often linked to an unwillingness to accept the country's colonial/modern cultural transformation, rather than to community numbers.

The group made the following recommendations:

- Minorities should be understood not only in terms of nationality, ethnicity or religion, but also in terms of political, economic and social marginalization.
- Civic education must address broad questions of peace and tolerance and must be modified to reflect communities' needs; it should not impose the elite's norms and values; and
- study needs to be carried out on indigenous knowledge to determine how it can be incorporated into curricula.

The Senegalese meetings, organized by l'Association Nationale pour l'Alphabétisation et la Formation des Adultes, involved NGOs, community leaders and associations involved with the preservation of indigenous/minority languages and minority rights and led to several suggestions for future work. These included: reform of the laws governing official languages; the introduction of indigenous/minority languages in schools and training centres so that they can become languages of the workplace; the integration of literacy programmes with popular community skills training; the production of teaching and learning materials and the development of programmes to publicize existing land ownership regulations. The meeting also

Adult literacy class in numeracy and the Pular language, near Richard Toll, Senegal.

noted that indigenous/minority language radio and press should be encouraged.

MRG invited minority and indigenous representatives attending CONFINTEA to attend a workshop the day before the conference officially opened to discuss their objectives and expectations. The workshop aimed to identify participants' needs and develop a cohesive plan of action for the week.

At the workshop, participants identified three key issues in relation to minorities: **civic education**, including minority and human rights; **literacy**, including economic wellbeing and fair allocation of resources; and **participatory curriculum reform.** (See box.) A key focus of discussion was how to raise these issues with as many delegations as possible during the week.

The possibility of submitting amendments to the conference's working documents was also discussed. (See below.) Several suggestions were made, including statements to the effect that: states must recognize and support the education rights of minorities and more resources should be allocated to the education of minority communities in light of their contribution to society.

Identified issues of concern

- Civic education of majority, heterogeneous and minority communities
- Curriculum reform (history)
- Economic survival, development and control of natural resources
- Empowerment
- Engagement of community, monitoring and evaluation
- Entitlement to basic education – poverty and literacy
- First victims are minorities
- Involvement of women
- Minorities' land rights
- Minority languages – equity between official and minority/indigenous 'local' languages – translation
- Minority materials
- National schools – separate provision – religious issues
- Nomads and literacy
- Own history and cultural heritage
- Regional issues
- Training minority communities.

In short, the session provided a flexible framework for participants – one that did not hinder individual initiatives, but was able to offer support when requested. It also allowed the delegates (and MRG staff) to meet each other, which helped humanize the large-scale event.

Conference structure

Some 1,500 government and NGO representatives, adult education researchers and practitioners took part in the conference. Unlike similar events in the past, NGO observers and official government delegations shared the same venue and attended the same working sessions. Although NGOs had certain limitations placed upon their work, governmental and non-governmental sectors were able to work in partnership. MRG suggests that, given the success of the conference, this structure should be used in future international meetings, and at the local level as well.

Much of the official work was carried out in plenary sessions and focused on finalizing the conference's draft working documents – the Declaration on Adult Learning, a short statement of principles, and Agenda for the Future, which will implement it. Over the course of the week, delegates introduced more than 400 amendments, most of which were accepted. Based on an analysis of the submissions, the Chair of the conference's drafts committee stated that delegates' priorities appeared to be first, gender, and second, minority and indigenous issues. Through their work at the conference and on the consultative committee, MRG and its participants were able to make significant changes to the working documents. Initially, there were no references to minority or indigenous issues; by the conclusion of the conference, there were important and sensitive references in both.

The representatives invited by MRG/UIE made interventions in several formal sessions. For example, Mona Makram-Ebeid, of the Association for the Advancement of Education, Egypt, made a very forceful presentation on the need to strengthen the commitment to minority education during debate on the amendments. She received public support from one African delegation.

Thirty-one thematic working groups were held over two days on various issues that reflected the diversity of the developing field of adult education. Topics ranged from 'literacy, education and social development' to 'migrant education' and 'adult learning, democracy and peace'. The working groups organized by MRG and UIE are discussed below.

Advocacy/contacts with other groups and activities

Much important work was also done outside the official conference. Throughout the week, for example, national, regional and thematic meetings were held. UK representatives met to examine strategies for encouraging adult learning in the UK, including the proposal to dedicate one hour per day to learning. Djibril Gueye, representing a Senegalese NGO providing literacy and human rights education to Senegal's minority communities, was very active in the Africa regional caucus. The contacts made could be taken forward through the establishment of a West African network on human and minority rights. Sessions specifically devoted to NGOs, women's issues, indigenous issues and human rights, to name a few, were also held.

On a more informal basis, all the invited participants met representatives of their country's delegations. Atyrkul Alisheva and Dina Shukurova from the Kyrgyz Peace Research Centre, for example, were able to persuade their government's delegation to sponsor amendments to the Draft Declaration. Tatyana Kim, from Tajikistan's Korean minority, brought that community's concerns, such as the lack of qualified teachers, to the attention of the Tajik delegate. The indigenous representatives split into two groups: one English-speaking and one Spanish-speaking. Both groups presented amendments through their respective delegations. Effective advocacy also involves publicity work, and several of the Asian participants met representatives of *Stern* magazine. Finally, participants had a unique opportunity to meet NGO colleagues from their own countries and around the world to discuss new teaching materials, policy initiatives and partnership opportunities.

Indigenous working group

The session on indigenous peoples and adult education was attended by an estimated 120 people, a third of whom were indigenous representatives. The first part of the session introduced the international context on the current status of adult education with regard to indigenous peoples. The second part focused on the views and perspectives of

Rodolfo Stavenhagen addressing the indigenous working group

indigenous peoples' representatives. The session was chaired by Jack Beetson, member of the Australian delegation and President of the Federation of Independent Aboriginal Education Providers of Australia.

Rodolfo Stavenhagen, a leading international expert on human rights in relation to indigenous peoples and member of the Delors Commission on Education for the twenty-first century, presented the first part of the session. He pointed to two basic shifts in thinking with regard to indigenous peoples: first, a change from government-directed and government-generated approaches to a human rights approach in which indigenous peoples are active; and second, a change in policy content, from a focus on assimilation to the concept of cultural citizenship. Both these changes are crucial to adult education policy, he maintained.

Referring to UN agreements over previous years, Stavenhagen stated that there was now a legal framework which was being used by indigenous peoples to establish a set of indigenous rights, focusing on the notion of collective rights in addition to individual human rights. Reflecting on the outcome of the UNESCO report of the Delors Commission, Stavenhagen proposed a set of parallels for indigenous peoples to interpret the four pillars of learning for the twenty-first century.

Learning to be = the right of self-identification and self-definition
Learning to know = the right to self-knowledge
Learning to do = the right to self-development
Learning to live together = the right to self-determination

Stavenhagen's presentation inspired a lively debate from the floor, from members of different indigenous groups, among others, which focused on such issues as linguistic rights, the rights of disabled people, the relation between political and educational action, and the use of the media.

In the second part of the session, the panel, chaired by Beetson, represented some of the independent indigenous organizations from around the world. Nora Rameka was present for the Maori Adult Education Association; Carl Christian Olsen from Greenland represented the Inuit Circumpolar Conference; Hilda Canari from Peru represented CADEP, from the Andean region; Rosalba Jimenez from Colombia, the Organizacion Nacional Indigena de Colombia; and Natalio Hernandez from Mexico, the Vice-Chair of the session, from the Casa de los Escritores Indigenas.

Carl Christian Olsen began by highlighting the transnational character of the Inuit people who inhabit areas of Canada, Greenland and the United States of America – 130 000 people in an area of 16 million square kilometres. He argued that it was impossible to put different aspects of Inuit life into separate boxes, labelled culture, education, environment, self-determination, etc., since these were inextricably linked. He stressed the subsistence nature of Inuit culture and contrasted it with that of the cash economy. Cultural education for the Inuit means education for subsistence and sustainable development on the Inuit's own terms, he argued. **Natalio Hernandez** drew attention to the need for dialogue between cultures, a process he called a constructive confrontation. He stressed the importance of indigenous peoples learning Spanish and other international languages so that projects can be developed within the broader societies. Adult education must, he said, be rooted in the same principles of intercultural education as those that have been proposed for primary education.

Hilda Canari emphasized the marked discrepancy between male and female literacy rates in indigenous communities; the gap between the two rates is growing, she added, and women's education is not considered as important as men's in the communities. Illiteracy, she said, has the face of a woman.

Nora Rameka spoke of how the Maori people are still struggling for agreements with the New Zealand government to be implemented. She called on the conference to propose ways for indigenous peoples to move forward in the field of education and, in particular, adult education.

Jack Beetson gave a graphic account of the conditions of the aboriginal people in Australia – conditions that apply in virtually all the indigenous societies of the world *vis-à-vis* the national societies in which they live. Aboriginal infants are four to five times more likely to die at birth, and those that survive are three times more likely to die in infancy. Life expectancy is 20 years below the national average. The education system in Australia historically had been deeply racist; there was in general inadequate funding for aboriginal education. He called for an honest and serious study of the UN Draft Declaration on Indigenous Peoples, which he termed the minimum international standards applicable to indigenous peoples. Finally, he made a call for the international community to recognize that indigenous peoples were the world's first peoples and, as such, possessed a special knowledge. It was the task of CONFINTEA V to present a collective voice on a global adult education programme for indigenous peoples.

Summing up the contributions, **Rosalba Jimenez** claimed that all the representatives had spoken of the same ideals, the same challenges and the same dreams. From New Zealand to Colombia, she said, the problems were the same. Indigenous peoples needed to speak to the whole world and search for solidarity and balance through education.

A lively discussion followed on the need to adjust the Declaration and the Agenda for the Future to reflect many of the concerns that had been expressed, and to be explicit in the terminology in these documents. The group agreed to meet as an indigenous caucus in order to propose amendments to the two documents.

Minorities working group

In the minorities session, the importance of cooperation between minority and majority communities was highlighted from the outset when the Chair, **Saad Eddin Ibrahim**, President of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies, Egypt, told the group that minority issues have been the principal source of internal conflict in the last decade. Mutual acceptance is not just a matter of common respect, he said, it is an urgent security matter.

MRG Director **Alan Phillips**, looking at the terms 'minorities and rights', indicated that there is no universal agreement about who is a 'minority'. In many parts of Africa, it is more appropriate to talk about nationalities and peoples, for example; in Asia, the distinction between minority and indigenous is often blurred. A

system of rights can be seen as an ethical code, which can be transformed into political and legal agreements and reflected in educational curricula. Most importantly, it should be embedded in our attitudes and in a culture of peace.

MRG sees the most important right of minorities as the right to existence and identity. Other pertinent rights for minorities include many social and cultural rights, such as the right to form associations. Certain economic rights, such as the right to participate in community-determined development, and civil rights, such as non-discrimination and equal enjoyment of justice, are also of particular importance to minorities. With these rights comes the implied state responsibility to provide education that promotes a supportive climate for equality and diversity. Political rights may be the most important, yet are the most consistently denied. These range from participation in government to functional or geographical autonomy.

Mona Makram-Ebeid, President of Egypt's Association for the Advancement of Education and former Member of the Egyptian parliament, discussed the need for countries to provide intercultural education that targets the majority as much as the marginalized. Such a system can support and strengthen democratic forces, which are founded upon tolerance and acceptance of the other.

The history of the Egyptian Coptic community illustrates how lack of information can lead to intercommunal ignorance, discrimination and violence. The Copts – a Christian Egyptian community – have made great contributions throughout the country's history, despite their marginalization. Copts became full citizens during the state's modernization, a status they maintained until 1952, when the Republic of Egypt was established. Now, however, centuries of progress are being reversed.

The mutual ignorance of the Copts and the majority community is in part the result of Egypt's formal education sector. Nothing is learnt about Copts in school, nor are their concerns reflected in the curriculum. The close relationship between these communities, such as shared festivals, is not sufficiently emphasized.

The education system should provide not only information about peoples' histories and cultures, however, but an ethical framework as well. The fundamental worth of the person should be recognized and educators must stress the need – the moral obligation – to respect others. Only with cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect can the intolerance born of ignorance, which allows extremists to incite violence, be overcome.

Smaranda Enache, of Liga Pro Europa, looked at the education system in Romania and suggested that the proper treatment of minorities is fundamental to a truly democratic society. There are 18 historical minorities in Romania, who comprise about 10.5 per cent of the population of 23.5 million. The Roma are the largest of the minorities and live throughout the country, while Hungarians are concentrated in Transylvania.

Participants identifying possible amendments to the Draft Declaration before CONFINTEA began.

Intercultural education is not yet an official priority and efforts are being made to stimulate the necessary political will to change legislation and allocate resources. There are many ways that intercultural information can be disseminated (see box) and target groups include teachers, media, politicians, local governments, public servants and the police.

Formal and informal avenues for the dissemination of intercultural information:

- Extracurricular activities, such as guided tours or holidays
- history curricula and textbooks
- literature
- media campaigns
- museums, national symbols, currency
- music and art curricula
- opportunities for the majority to learn minority languages in compact minority areas.

The legal status of education in peoples' own or first language has made progress in Romania and the constitution protects minorities' linguistic, cultural and political rights. This relatively liberal legislation is the result of the reform process that began in 1989 and its success is due in part to minorities participation as well as demonstrable political will and competence. Romania's accession to European treaties and documents, such as the Minority and Regional Language Charter and various bilateral treaties, has also been important. Nonetheless, legislation does not yet fully reflect the country's international commitments.

However, there are still difficulties in this highly political area. On a practical level, minorities lack skilled teachers. The economic situation makes it difficult to endorse political reforms; the state's reluctance to restore minority ownership exacerbates minorities' economic difficulties. Local discrimination policies against Roma, for example, are not uncommon. The media can heighten inter-ethnic tensions, fear and misunderstandings. Finally, mentalities change more slowly than legislation, and ultra-nationalist groups are very vocal in opposing reforms.

This last point highlights the vulnerability of political and legislative changes in this part of the world. To help ensure Romania's stable, long-term development, the formal education system must be changed, with input from the country's human rights and minority rights NGOs, to reflect and celebrate the country's multicultural reality.

Teeka Bhattarai discussed the work of his organization, Seacon, with one of Nepal's indigenous minority groups, the Chepang, focusing on how it illustrates the need to recognize communities' different learning systems. Nepal is home to dozens of ethnic minorities, and people are often divided by caste, as well as by ethnicity.

The Chepang community is a marginalized minority in many ways. They make up only 0.04 per cent of the population – some 40 000 people. They survive on marginal land and often face food and cash shortages. Culturally, the Chepang are neither Hindu nor Buddhist and their language is a Tibeto-Burman dialect. Political representation is limited. Communities live in isolated villages; the one in which Seacon works is about 9–12 hours' walk from the nearest road.

Chepang society is culturally rich, traditional and egalitarian with regard to gender and age, and enjoys a high degree of personal liberty. But, there are few modern health facilities and infant mortality is high, although there is a strong traditional healing system. There is no migration.

The education system Seacon promotes is based on compatible forms of learning systems: songs are used to

promote discussion and communication, for example. The establishment of a printing press in the village in which Seracou is working has facilitated documentation of Chepang folklore, demystifying book-based knowledge as well as helping to maintain literacy and the learning environment in the village.

Work with the Chepang has revealed a difference between the knowledge system of indigenous communities and that of the majority. One of the gatherings held before CONFINTEA was convened pointed out that the traditional systems of learning are adaptive to circumstances, and, combined with tradition, ensure that values are transferred, livelihood issues are addressed and learning is not made a burden.

General suggested guidelines for educational work with minority communities:

- One of the first areas for minority education should be for the minority community to look at its own identities and discuss why it is a minority. A sense of the importance of the minority community must be developed and often feelings of inferiority will need to be overcome. A community should look beyond any imposed characteristic and identify its own intrinsic characteristics. Chepang men, for example, do housework and carry babies with them when they work. The community should consider what it has to offer, not only what it lacks.
- The role of a minority's knowledge and memory patterns in community education must be recognized. Equating education with reading and writing can negate other forms of knowledge. People can and do communicate valuable knowledge without having to write; the psychological pressure of being 'illiterate' can create an additional sense of inferiority.
- Curricula's potentially homogenizing effects must be avoided. There are numerous examples of curricula's imposed values, such as the superiority of towns over villages. This in most cases serves the purposes of the dominant community. Should education serve to assimilate minorities into the majority community, or build on the characteristics of individual cultures?

Ambassador Rai spoke not as the Nepalese representative, but from his own experience as a member of a minority community. This included admission to a school where teaching was conducted in a language he did not understand and where he was forbidden to speak the only language he knew.

Representatives of Bolivia, Hungary and Nigeria made contributions from the floor. The Hungarian delegate mentioned Hungary's special strategy for Roma, as well as the existence of a few Roma-language schools and some materials being produced in Romani, Hungarian and Romanian. The Nigerian delegate raised the difficulties of educating minorities in a country that has approximately 360 ethnic groups.

Several of the invited participants sponsored by MRGUIE also made contributions. **Romero Rodriguez**, of Uruguay's Mundo Afro, indicated that despite the existence of 90 million black people in South America, the descendants of those transported through the slave trade, there is no coordinated approach to Afro-American history. The Indian participants discussed the historical insensitivity of the country's curriculum materials. **Akay Jabria Minz** and **Anjali Daimari** emphasized that teaching should be done through different media, including songs and storytelling. **Avdhash Kaushal** focused on the lack of opportunities facing minority communities and the need to develop legal frameworks to address these issues.

Palestinian women learning computing at UNWRA's Women's Training College near Ramallah on the occupied West Bank.

Policy recommendations

Policy recommendations are based on the following statements of principle:

- Basic education is a fundamental entitlement, the importance of which is highlighted by the link between poverty and literacy levels.
- In a civil society, education empowers all communities, be they majority, heterogeneous or minority.
- Minority and indigenous communities face social and economic barriers to their full participation in most societies.
- Proper education enhances chances for economic survival and control of natural resources.
- Tensions resulting from the marginalization of minority and indigenous communities is increasingly a source of misunderstanding, grievances and violence.

It is therefore in the interest of minority *and* majority communities to develop inclusive educational systems that promote a culture of peace and understanding. The following recommendations are made to achieve that goal:

- Civic education is needed for all adult learners. An understanding of individual and social rights and obligations can complement knowledge of the other and help develop a culture of peace and mutual respect.
- Employment training opportunities should be available to minority communities affected by economic upheavals.

- Mainstream curricula should be reformed to address minorities' history and cultural heritage. Curricula that reflect no more than the perspective of the elites are not only unbalanced and inaccurate, they can foster ignorance and intolerance, which often leads to violence.
- Minorities should not only be consulted in the planning and design of educational opportunities and materials; their needs and ways of learning should form an intrinsic part of the programmes offered. They should also be involved in monitoring and evaluation. This will help prevent the imposition of programmes that are inappropriate or ineffective, and result in improved outcomes and a more effective use of resources.
- Minority-specific materials should be developed. These do not have to be resource-intensive. The work of Seracow and others reveal that educational opportunities can be found in many places.
- The benefits of separate provision for minority communities within national school programmes should be examined.
- There should be greater equity between official and 'local' languages in the provision of education, including a greater commitment to providing translation.

There is no one solution to these issues; regional, even local, variations must be taken into account. In the face of comprehensive problems, there is a tendency to look for comprehensive solutions. This temptation must be overcome. Local minorities and indigenous communities must be consulted in programme development and implementation, not because it is the 'right' thing to do, but because it leads to more effective and lasting results.

Follow-up activities

It is integral to the project that the work before and at the conference be taken forward – that communities learn about its conclusions and benefit from participants' experiences. MRG and UIE are hoping to encourage this process through the sponsorship of follow-up activities. Possibilities were discussed at the conference, and participants returned to their communities to obtain further input before making commitments. Activities fell into three general categories. First, it was suggested that several prototypes of curricula and materials be developed, such as those designed specifically for the teaching of minority communities (in Bangladesh, Tajikistan and Thailand). Materials on minority rights (in Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan and Uganda) were also of interest, as were materials on the history and culture of minority

Adult literacy class, Chiquimula, Guatemala

CONFINTEA participants discussing strategy and possible follow-up activities (from left: Mary Mmz, Djibril Cisse, Martin Enserink, Angele Diamant, and Aridhashi Kawshal)

communities (in Egypt and Uruguay). Representatives from Albania and Senegal expressed an interest in capacity-building and training for NGOs as well.

Another development was a nascent South Asian network of adult educators and members of minorities. Participants from Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Thailand expressed interest in such a network and there are plans to meet later on to discuss possible future development.

Finally, the representatives from Latin American indigenous communities are planning to meet in Mexico in early 1998 to discuss ways they can take the conference discussions forward.

Participants' comments

Participants, when asked to evaluate their experience at CONFINTEA, touched on the personal and professional benefits of the preparatory work, the positive effect of minority and indigenous peoples' presence at the event, as well as the ways they expected their work to benefit upon their return. Their comments included:

"In my personal experience this conference was very useful because of the new experiences and the knowledge I have gained to improve education ... with people of my ethnic group, prioritizing my work with indigenous women from my area. It has been useful because it has opened new roads for us to do better work."

"Just the fact that it has been made possible for us to participate by funding our travel and stay is a very important step. I think that the participation of representatives of minorities in this kind of event is essential and should increase."

"I realized that attending conferences is not just to listen but to influence and force your voice to be heard."

"The exchange that took place with other minority groups was useful to find new methodologies and adapt those to concrete cases and locations."

"Both governments and NGOs should feel obliged to work together in our country following the Declaration. This is a democratic principle and not an imposition of our education, as it has always been. Now we possess another tool to defend our rights."

"Using the draft conference documents and the discussions in other thematic working groups as a yardstick, I think minority issues would have received scant attention [without the participation of the minority and indigenous representatives]."

List of participants

Ronald Aberma	Organization of Indigenous Peoples in Surinam (OIS), Surinam
Ndemeye Anicet	Association pour la Promotion des Batwa, Rwanda
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Tandra Chakma	Bangladesh Indigenous Hill People's Association (BIHPAA), Bangladesh
Marcel Courthiade	Romani Baxt, Albania
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Minority Rights Group International

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Cover photo (left): Aboriginal women using a laptop computer, Arnhem Land, Australia.